

Global histories

a student
journal

Conference Review: Communicating Community: Anarchism and Its Boundaries Florence, Italy, 8th of July 2019

Author: Oscar Broughton

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/GHSJ.2019.337>

Source: Global Histories, Vol. 5, No. 2 (November 2019), pp. 188-190.
ISSN: 2366-780X

Copyright © 2019 Oscar Broughton



License URL: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Publisher information:

'Global Histories: A Student Journal' is an open-access bi-annual journal founded in 2015 by students of the M.A. program Global History at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. 'Global Histories' is published by an editorial board of Global History students in association with the Freie Universität Berlin.

Freie Universität Berlin
Global Histories: A Student Journal
Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut
Koserstraße 20
14195 Berlin

Contact information:

For more information, please consult our website www.globalhistories.com or contact the editor at: admin@globalhistories.com.

*Communicating Community:
Anarchism and Its Boundaries*

Florence, Italy, 8th of July 2019

European University Institute

reviewed by

OSCAR BROUGHTON

Set in the rolling Tuscan hills that surround Florence, the European University Institute (EUI) has in recent years become an unlikely, yet common, setting for scholars interested in anarchism. Following in this new tradition the “Communicating Community: Anarchism and Its Boundaries” workshop held at the EUI on the 8th of July 2019 was a natural development and was supported by the collaboration of the Global Intellectual History graduate school in Berlin and the EUI.

This workshop brought together researchers based at the EUI and from abroad for a one-day workshop, which saw the presentation of various historical approaches towards anarchism. Central to this workshop was the theme of “communication” which designated the different ways that ideas and practices relating to anarchism, ranging from philosophical traditions to practices of translation and mass propaganda efforts, have been expressed. This theme allowed for discussions relating to the use of ‘anarchism’ as a term either actively embraced or deliberately avoided by historical actors; and spilled into conversations about how different contexts determined the meaning of this label and its potential to identify and exclude adversaries or appeal to particular audiences. Across four panels discussion circulated through these themes and touched upon a variety of social, political, intellectual and cultural approaches

to the history of anarchism. This allowed for differing and overlapping perspectives to emerge as anarchism was discussed in relation to varying political strategies, the conceptual boundaries and linkages to other forms of socialism and syndicalism, and differences in meanings which have appeared across the *longue durée* of anarchist histories.

In the first panel which dealt with contested figures within the broader canon of anarchism John-Erik Hansson (Université de Cergy-Pontoise) examined the place of William Godwin within the genealogy of anarchist thought and recurrent debates which have occurred around Godwin’s ideas. This was followed by Tommaso Giordani (Tallinn University) who examined the often ambiguous position of Georges Sorel in relation to anarchism and argued for a vigorous reappraisal of Sorel’s consistent anti-statism.

This panel was subsequently followed by another which dealt with transnational anarchist campaigns. Oscar Broughton (Freie Universität Berlin/ Humboldt Universität Berlin) began this panel with an examination of the National Guilds League during the fading era of transnational anarcho-syndicalism in the early twentieth century and addressed the role of print media and translation in this history. Constance Bantman (University of Surrey) continued many of these themes with a discussion of the importance of Jean Grave and his role within transpolitical anarchist networks which drew particular attention to the significance

of various forms of political campaigning.

Following these discussions, the next panel focussed on anarchism set against the backdrop of early globalisation. This featured Robert Kramm (University of Hong Kong) who presented the case of early twentieth-century anarchist-communism in Japan and its distinctive development from other forms of anarchism in Japan during this period. This was followed by Pascale Siegrist (EUI) who presented the case of anarchist geographer Lev Mechnikov whose knowledge of ten languages and time spent in Japan informed his fusion of anarchist philosophy with scientific thinking.

The final panel focused on new perspectives on the most well known historical case of mass anarchism in Spain. Opening the panel Arturo Zoffmann Rodríguez (EUI) examined the changing significance and historical memory of the 1917 Russian Revolutions for Spanish anarchists during the 1920s and 1930s. This presentation was followed by Danny Evans (Liverpool Hope University) who discussed the changing meaning of Bolshevism within the CNT during the 1930s. Jessica Thorne (Royal Holloway, University of London) concluded this panel with her analysis of anarchist prisoners who were held captive under Franco's regime between 1950 and 1975 and explored their connection to the emerging New Left and the Anarchist Black Cross.

A concluding discussion reflected upon how questions of

diffusionism and Eurocentrism were still relevant issues that needed to be addressed in history writing about anarchism, however there was also a clear sense that major efforts have been made to address these issues particularly since Lucian van der Walt and Steven Hirsch's calls to provincialise anarchism in 2010.¹ New pathways in research also came into clear focus such as the need for more analysis of overlooked actors who performed vital supportive roles for communication networks and often assisted major anarchist figures. Furthermore the importance of looking beyond the container of the nation-state, which has now become a mainstay since the "global turn," was also reevaluated in relation to the question of mobility. Suggestions to move beyond the fetishism of mobility towards a focus on the non-mobile and how this can still be understood in relation to transnational and transimperial contexts were also discussed. Additionally there was also clear consensus that there is currently a golden age in terms of research into anarchism which has driven research forward significantly in the last twenty years. This trend does not seem to be declining as this workshop proved and as more research than ever before refocuses anarchism in new and expansive ways.

1 L. van der Walt and S.J. Hirsch, *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940* (Brill, 2010), xlv.